

# Keeping Your Phone Number When You Change Your Service Provider

## FCC Consumer Facts

### Background

Telephone number portability is a service that provides residential and business traditional (wired) telephone customers with the ability to retain, at the same location, their existing local telephone numbers when switching from one local telephone service provider to another.

### History

In 1996 Congress reexamined and changed the Telecommunications Act to promote competition and reduce regulation in all telecommunications markets. Before that time, a major barrier to competition was the inability of customers to switch from one telephone company to another while retaining the same telephone number. Congress directed local telephone companies to offer telephone number portability.

In order to provide the kind of telephone number portability envisioned by Congress, telephone companies had to invest in upgrades to their networks. In 1998, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) evaluated the cost involved in local number portability and determined that existing local telephone companies were allowed, but not required, to recover the costs of implementing and providing telephone number portability through two kinds of charges: (1) charges paid by other telephone companies that use a telephone company's number portability facilities to process their own calls; and (2) a small, fixed monthly charge assessed on telephone customers or "end users."

### What is the Long-Term Telephone Number Portability End-User Charge?

The long-term number portability end-user charge is a fixed, monthly charge through which local telephone companies may recover certain costs of providing long-term number portability service.

Recoverable costs include those for creating new facilities, physically upgrading or improving the existing public switched telephone network, and performing the ongoing functions associated with providing long-term number portability. FCC rules state that incumbent local telephone companies may, but are not required to, recover certain costs of providing number portability by charging their customer a monthly fee.

### Am I Required to Pay the Long-Term Portability Charge if I Am a Lifeline Assistance Program Customer?

Carriers can not impose the monthly long-term number portability charge on customers of the Lifeline Assistance Program.

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### **Does Long-term Telephone Number Portability Mean That I Can Keep the Same Telephone Number if I Move Across Town or to Another State?**

The type of telephone number portability that local telephone companies must provide is called "service provider portability." Service provider portability allows a customer to keep his telephone number when changing local telephone companies. It does not allow customers to take their telephone numbers with them when they move.

### **Can I Keep the Same Wireline Telephone Number if I Switch My Local Telephone Service to a Cellular or Personal Communications Service (PCS) Telephone Service Provider or Vice-Versa?**

Cellular and other wireless carriers are not required to provide telephone number portability at this time. For this reason, customers cannot retain the same local telephone number if they change their local service from a wireline local telephone company to a wireless carrier, like a cellular or PCS service provider. Likewise, customers cannot switch from a cellular or PCS service provider to a local wireline service provider and keep the same cellular or PCS telephone number.

### **Will All Telephone Customers Be Charged for Telephone Number Portability?**

Local telephone companies can only charge customers in areas where local telephone number portability is available to all consumers. Telephone number portability may not be available in all service areas.

### **Does the FCC Require Local Telephone Companies to Bill Consumers for Long-Term Telephone Number Portability?**

The FCC allows, but does not require, local telephone companies to pass certain costs of implementing and maintaining long-term number portability on to their customers.

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For example, the FCC allows incumbent local telephone companies to recover only costs directly related to providing long-term telephone directly related to providing long-term telephone number portability, which keeps the charges passed on to consumers, if any, as small as possible. New entrants to the local telephone market, wireless telephone service providers, and long distance companies also incur additional costs in handling calls to numbers that are portable. Because the FCC neither regulates the rates nor dictates the maximum amount carriers can charge their customers, carriers may choose to recover their costs of providing long-term telephone number portability in any lawful manner consistent with their obligations under the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

### **How Long Will the Long-term Telephone Number Portability Charge Remain on My Telephone Bill?**

Your local telephone company may continue to assess this charge on your telephone bill for five years from the date it first began itemizing the charge on your bill. At the end of the five-year period, your local telephone company must stop assessing the charge.

### **Why Do Different Telephone Companies Charge Different Amounts?**

Telephone companies have a variety of network equipment and can incur different costs in preparing their systems to provide number portability. The charge that appears on your monthly telephone bill for number portability may cover certain costs of implementing and providing number portability service.

For more information on keeping your phone number when you change your service provider and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission's electronic subscriber service, click on [www.fcc.gov/cgb/emailservice.html](http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/emailservice.html).



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